DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 401 397 CE 072 884

AUTHOR Pettitt, Aidan
TITLE Adults and GNVQs.
INSTITUTION Further Education Development Agency, London (England).
REPORT NO ISSN-1361-9969
PUB DATE 96
NOTE 59p.
AVAILABLE FROM Further Education Development Agency, Publications Dept., Mendip Centre, Blagdon, Bristol BS18 6RG, United Kingdom (10 British pounds).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)
JOURNAL CIT Developing FE (FEDA Report); v1 n4 1996

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; Adult Programs; *Adult Students; *Curriculum Development; Delivery Systems; Educational Demand; Educational Needs; Feasibility Studies; Foreign Countries; *Noncollege Bound Students; Postsecondary Education; Prior Learning; Program Development; *Reentry Students; Student Certification; Student Recruitment; Technical Institutes; *Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS Educational Marketing; *General National Vocational Qualif (England)

ABSTRACT

This document is intended for further education colleges in the United Kingdom wishing to extend their General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) provision to adults, extend their adult students' options for accreditation, or review the suitability of different qualification routes for adults. It presents information about the development of GNVQ delivery for adult students that was gathered during a 1994 study of the feasibility of offering GNVQs to students aged 19 years or older who are not interested in pursuing higher education. Presented first are brief overviews of the various government-approved certification methods and the research project on which this document is based. In the next two sections, reasons for offering GNVQs to adults are examined and GNVQs are compared with other qualifications. Strategies for marketing GNVQs to adults and recruiting adults to GNVQs are examined in section 4, and guidelines for organizing GNVQ provision for adults are provided in section 5. Section 6 discusses selected aspects of designing GNVQ learning programs (induction programs, teaching strategies, core skills, assessment, course teams, and evaluation). Concluding the document are a brief conclusion, information about the Further Education Development Agency's (FEDA) GNVQ support program for 1996-97, a list of related FEDA publications, and a glossary. (MN)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S Bourne

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED 401 397

FEDA Further Education Development Agency

Adults and GNVQs

Aidan Pettitt

DEVELOPING FE

FEDA report

GS072884

BEST COPY AVAILABLE 2

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

FEDA Further Education Development Agency

Adults and GNVQs

Aidan Pettitt

DEVELOPING FE

FEDA report

Developing FE (FEDA Reports)

Developing FE is a new series produced by the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA). Each issue focuses on a single theme and is a key reference text for those involved with the management of post-compulsory education. There will be ten issues in each volume.

Published by the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA),

Citadel Place, Tinworth Street, London SE11 5EH

Tel: 0171-962 1280 Fax: 0171-962 1266

Registered with the Charity Commissioners

Printed by Henry Ling Limited, Dorchester

Editor: Jennifer Rhys

Designer: Michael Pope

ISSN 1361 9969

© 1996 FEDA

All rights are reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, electrical, chemical, optical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright holder.

Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Why offer GNVQs to adults?	3
3. Comparing GNVQs and other qualifications	7
4. Marketing GNVQs to adults and recruiting adults to GNVQs	17
5. Organising GNVQ provision for adults	23
6. The GNVQ learning programme for adults	35
7. Conclusion	47
8. FEDA's GNVQ Support Programme 1996-7	51
FEDA publications series	53
Glossary	55

Acknowledgements

FEDA would like to thank the following individuals, organisations, and colleges:

Paul Armstrong, Birkbeck College, University of London
Peter Bowyer
Nick Brewster, Bishop Auckland College
Alan Brown, University of Surrey
Amanda Cook, Transcend Technology Ltd
Sue Dare, Lewes Tertiary College
Nadia Edmond, Mainframe Research & Consultancy
Tim Edmunds, DFEE
Christina Fowers, Tile Hill College, Coventry
Nicholette Goff, Kent Adult Education Service
Rhuwina Griffiths, Consultant
Heather Hidden, City College Manchester
Cecilia McKelvey, University of Greenwich
Bob Mellor and Catriona Johnstone, Farnborough College
Wendy Pawson, Wakefield College
Ian Priestman, Hull College
Margaret Shepherd, Eastbourne College
Colin Walker
Paulina Wall, Manchester TEC
and staff from:
Blackpool & the Fylde College
Carmarthenshire College of Arts & Technology
East Berkshire College
East Down College of Further & Higher Education
Fircroft College of Adult Education, Birmingham
Hillcroft College, Surrey
Humberside Adult Education Service
Soundwell College, Bristol
Warrington Collegiate Institute
West Nottinghamshire College

FEDA project team
Aidan Pettitt Anna Reisenberger

Chapter 1
Introduction

Many colleges wish to increase participation rates among adults. This is not simply because they recognise their duty to all sections of the community. As the FEFC's Chief Inspector reported: 'there is now a significant and growing demand for further and higher education from adults, especially on a part-time basis' (*Quality and Standards in FE in England*, FEFC(E)).

The last few years have witnessed a move toward accreditation through national qualifications. Colleges have been encouraged by government, FEFC and NCVQ to accredit as much of their provision as possible using GCSEs and GCE A levels, NVQs and, since 1993, GNVQs.

The strengths and weaknesses of GCE A levels and NVQs for adults are well known. GNVQs combine characteristics of both academic and job-specific qualifications, enabling students to keep their options open. Many colleges are keen to see more adults benefit from GNVQs and more adults attracted to FE through the use of GNVQs.

For these reasons, FEDA undertook a project started by FEU in 1994 to study the development of GNVQ delivery for adult students.

The research project concluded that GNVQs can be offered:

- to students aged 19 and over — indeed the age of students aiming for GNVQs in the project colleges ranged from 19 to 60
- in a variety of ways, including as a part-time course

It also concluded that absolute definitions of 'adult' or 'part time' are not always useful. Most adults are 'part-time' students although their pattern of attendance varies. This is because most have commitments and responsibilities other than their study.

Much of the research for this publication was based on centres offering GNVQs to adults at Intermediate and Advanced levels in the well established Business, Science and Art & Design GNVQs. As the project concluded, it was apparent that the newer GNVQs in Retail & Distributive Services and Information Technology have particular potential.

This report forms the first stage in FEDA's analysis of the issues facing those wanting to offer GNVQs to adults, and further research is planned. It examines the adult market for GNVQs; compares GNVQs with other courses and qualifications available to adults; and points to the attractions of GNVQs for adults. It discusses different patterns of attendance and concludes with some guidance on designing GNVQ courses for adults.

It should be of interest to:

- colleges wishing to extend their GNVQ provision to adults
- adult education centres wishing to extend their students' options for accreditation
- institutions reviewing the suitability of different qualification routes for adults

Chapter 2

Why offer GNVQs to adults?

The creation and development of GNVQs in 1993 provided colleges with a welcome opportunity to review and develop their vocational curriculum.

Running parallel to the introduction of GNVQs came the steady growth in the adult student market. This trend is likely to continue. As the FEFC commented: 'there is likely to be a need for more short courses, more part-time provision...colleges will be attracted more and more by the higher education and adult markets'. (*Quality and Standards in FE in England*, FEFC(E), 1995)

In the three years GNVQs have been generally available, they have been very successful. However, a national survey carried out jointly by FEDA (and previously FEU), the Institute of Education and the Nuffield Foundation has found that around ten per cent of GNVQ students were over 19, and less than five per cent of the sample described themselves as part-time students. This should not be too surprising as GNVQs were designed primarily for school leavers.

Offering GNVQs to adults

One college in the study commented:

> *'Adult learners have many more varied and different wants and needs than school leavers and so because GNVQs can be customised they can be far more attractive to some adults than they are to many 16-year-old students*

A number of GNVQ characteristics could make them attractive to adults. They can offer:

- a broad range of vocational skills and knowledge appropriate for those wanting to return to work or change jobs but not wanting specific occupational training or to lose the possibility of studying further
- a unit-based system. The unit structure of GNVQs means students can gain certificates for individual units. Units can be added, at a later point, until the student has the full qualification
- learning courses of varying lengths. The absence of fixed time limits on how long students need to take to complete a GNVQ means they can achieve a GNVQ as quickly, or as slowly, as their abilities and circumstances allow
- some flexibility in choice of units and subject. One college involved in the project allowed students to choose from a range of units from the GNVQs in Leisure & Tourism, Business and Retail & Distributive Services. Other centres made a virtue of the ability of the GNVQ to be offered alongside other qualifications or units from other qualifications. For example, students can take occupationally specific NVQ units or GCSEs alongside their GNVQ
- core skill accreditation. The inclusion of core skills* in GNVQs can be attractive to adults. Indeed some students want to achieve the GNVQ core skills even though they are studying for GCE A levels, NVQs or on Access courses

- the opportunity to use prior experiences toward the GNVQ. The GNVQ assessment system depends upon a student compiling a portfolio, and evidence of any relevant past achievements can count toward the qualification

Of course, there are currently many qualifications for which adults study. In 1994-5 74% of those studying for advanced level vocational qualifications in FE were undertaking qualifications other than NVQs and GNVQs. This amounted to over 350,000 students, a large proportion of whom were adults (FEFC Statistics).

* From July 1996 core skills are to be known as key skills but as this change of name signifies no other change (of content, level, etc.), this publication will continue to use the more widely known phrase.

Chapter 3

Comparing GNVQs and other qualifications for adults

GNVQs and GCE A levels

Many adults study GCE A levels (or GCSEs) at colleges, often in the evening, yet colleges know that for many adults this type of qualification is inappropriate. Students who wish to study three separate subjects may find GCE A levels attractive but the unit structure of GNVQs also allows students to study a range of contrasting, if related, topics. Core skills, increasingly valued by employers and HE alike, are a necessary and essential part of all GNVQs and the assessment regime for GNVQs is quite different to the GCE A-level system. GNVQs rely far more on continuous assessment than on external exams and students provide most evidence of achievement in core and vocational skills through a portfolio.

Adults studying for GCE A levels are likely to have different aspirations and backgrounds from those who enrol for GNVQs. They will often:

- be 'young' adults (between 19 and 25)
- want to progress to university and degree study
- have formal entry qualifications — particularly GCSEs

- have a strong interest in particular academic subjects rather than an interest in a broad vocational area

GNVQ and vocational qualifications

FE colleges have traditionally provided a wide range of quite specific vocational courses, both full and part time.

NVQs are particularly valuable for adults in work with access to work-based assessment opportunities and supported by their employer. But NVQs are not appropriate for employed adults who do not wish to study for a qualification related to their current work or who do not have the support of their employer. For adults not in employment, NVQs are very rarely a realistic option even if they are appropriate. Nor are NVQs as appropriate for those individuals who wish to keep open the prospect of progression to HE.

As GNVQs do not demand access to work-based assessment they can be taken by individuals no matter what their job or employment status. GNVQs are also appropriate for progression to HE as well as to employment.

Of course many students aged over 19 in colleges will be studying for older vocational qualifications such as the BTEC National.

Although some GNVQs are more 'vocational' than others and the content of some BTEC National awards is very similar to that of some GNVQs, there was general agreement that GNVQs were, overall, less practical than BTEC Nationals.

Where students want a very broad vocational course, the vocational relevance of the GNVQ will not be an issue. However, the GNVQs in Art & Design and Health & Social Care were criticised for sometimes excluding important vocational options which had recruited well in the past. In one college the team leader for the Advanced GNVQ in Art & Design lamented:

We have lost Photography completely at this level — it is simply not possible to run a GNVQ in Photography.

Another college responded to the reported weakness of the GNVQ in Health & Social Care as a progression route to specialist vocations by re-introducing a BTEC National in Science (Health Studies) for those wishing to enter medical professions (e.g. radiography) and keeping the National Diploma in Nursery Nursing, which had the biggest recruitment in the department.

GNVQs were also not thought to be adequate replacements for the dedicated part-time BTEC National Certificate. The GNVQ, unlike the BTEC qualification, does not have a reduced content for those wishing to study part time. Colleges identified time constraints as a major issue when delivering a 'part-time' GNVQ. They were reluctant to abandon some BTEC National Certificates and risk losing many part-time registrations, often from older students. This was especially true where the BTEC National Certificate was offered mainly to those working in occupations relevant to the qualification.

One college, enthusiastic about GNVQs, decided to keep the BTEC National Certificate in Business and introduce, for the first time, a BTEC National Certificate in Leisure Studies. In another, staff explained:

Employers tell us that they prefer the content of the BTEC National Certificates and the students we recruit to the Certificates are employed, older than our GNVQ students and want a qualification that will lead to a Higher National Certificate or a Certificate in Management Studies.

One college tutor thought students in relevant employment would find a Higher National Certificate in Design no more work than an Advanced GNVQ. This was because the former recognised (and encouraged) work-based learning, the latter did not.

The project concluded that existing part-time vocational provision is often more appropriate than GNVQs when adult students are:

- in work and supported by the employer
- wanting a qualification in the same sector as their employment
- wanting a part-time course
- wanting to stay in employment after gaining the qualification

GNVQs and Access provision

Access provision is primarily concerned with progression to HE and as such highly valued by many HE institutions. Access courses are designed specifically for mature students and are expanding rapidly.

After comparing the two qualifications most staff concluded that GNVQ is more suitable than most Access provision as a pre-employment qualification. On the other hand, for adults without GCE A levels, Access provision is a more appropriate route to HE. There are several reasons for this:

- An Access course is designed to be delivered over one year while Advanced GNVQs are designed to take two years to complete normally . Many adults have to make financial sacrifices to study and if they see an acceptable, one-year route to HE they are unlikely to opt for a two-year GNVQ. Although many centres offer GNVQ courses over shorter periods, the volume of work needed demands a high commitment from the adult learner.
- Some HE institutions require GNVQ students to achieve GNVQ units or a GCE A level in addition to the GNVQ. This is significantly more difficult if the student also wishes to complete the course in less than two years 'full time'. Access students are unlikely to be expected to achieve anything beyond the Access certificate.

- Pressures of time may be less of an issue for unemployed students who may be able to spend more time studying than the employed student. Unfortunately DSS restrictions on the number of hours claimants can study can limit their study hours per week.

Despite the general advantage Access provision has over GNVQs as a reliable and well established route to HE for adults, GNVQ can be the better route in certain circumstances. Many Access courses are geared towards less specifically vocational subjects — Social Science or Humanities. This makes GNVQs more suited than Access for progression to vocational and especially business, technical and design-based HND and degree courses. In addition, some adult students prefer GNVQs. In one college, some adults attended both an Access course and a GNVQ programme for several weeks before deciding which route to follow. One commented:

> *Although the Access course is obviously designed for adults, and especially those with responsibilities outside the course, the GNVQ course is very positive and the accumulation of units can be motivating.*

Another said:

> *I like the analytical aspect of GNVQs and GNVQ is a better system for full-time college or employment in the future but the Access course tends to suit part-time study better and students with other responsibilities. I prefer the Access marking system but the rigid guidelines of the GNVQ mean that I know what I am supposed to do in order to pass.*

In another college, staff thought all adult provision should include time for students to develop personal approaches and strategies for learning. Many Access courses encourage this but the core skills of problem solving and personal skills, designed for use with GNVQ students, can also be used in this way.

One significant difference between Access courses and Advanced GNVQs is that Access courses build up to university level whereas all GNVQ units are assessed at Advanced level. Appropriate induction is therefore crucial to GNVQ students.

Helping adult students choose the right qualification

In general, adults are less likely to have firm ideas about the qualifications they want than school leavers. Often this is because their knowledge and understanding of the qualifications system are out of date and incomplete. Conversely, they will have often thought carefully about returning to study and will make sacrifices to do so. Thus adult students will usually be well motivated although they may lack the confidence of many school leavers.

In choosing their qualification, adults are likely to be influenced by:

- their previous experience of education, work and adulthood — experiences which will not always have been positive
- their personal circumstances and responsibilities — in particular the time and money they can afford to devote to the course
- their likely employment or further and higher education prospects as a consequence of the course

Much of this report concerns the Advanced GNVQ but the Intermediate GNVQ has attractions to adults and was offered in some colleges. Some adults, returning to study after time away from formal education are better able to cope with Intermediate level. The Intermediate GNVQ's biggest attraction over the Advanced may be that it can be completed within a year. Nor does it seem that Intermediate GNVQs need block progression routes for adults.

One centre in the study found that students with an Intermediate GNVQ, obtained within a year, were offered places in HE as mature students. Other centres found employers thought the Intermediate

GNVQ adequate for employment purposes and one actually preferred the Intermediate GNVQ to the Advanced.

Pre-entry guidance

The importance of pre-entry guidance services for adults cannot be over-emphasised. No matter how effective the systems in place for school leavers may be, different and dedicated systems will need to be in place for adults.

It is essential that adults are given a realistic understanding of the amount of work required for the course, especially for fast-track GNVQs or courses which demand fairly intensive study. An Advanced GNVQ is of GCE A-level standard and the course covers as much work as two GCE A levels. In addition, the assessment system demands that students compile a portfolio of their work.

Adults will also need to be provided with a very clear description of the various choices and variations on the GNVQ created by selecting different optional and mandatory units. For example, a GNVQ in Leisure & Tourism can be customised to emphasise leisure-related options; occupations in the travel industry could be combined with NVQ units in customer care or a GCSE in geography.

Adults will want reliable guidance on progression from the course before making a final decision to study for a GNVQ. GNVQs are particularly suitable for adults who have yet to make firm decisions on progression, especially if they know what vocational area they want. In practice, though, most GNVQ students wish to continue in further and higher education. A number of GNVQ centres have entered into compacts, or agreements, with local universities on progression from GNVQs to certain HE programmes. This enables centres to be explicit about the chances of progression to higher level study and any requirements for progression from GNVQ to HE at the point of recruitment. Prospective students need to know the progression

implications of various combinations of units as some optional units may be preferred for some HE courses.

The compacts and progression agreements for GNVQ courses offered to school leavers can be very different from those for adults.

> *One centre offering the Intermediate Art & Design to adults reported that HE institutions were happy to accept their students on to HE courses. This did not happen where students were aged 16-19. Another centre found universities were more likely to accept adults than school leavers with the GNVQ alone. Centres reported, in general, that adults with GNVQs were treated very favourably by HE. One centre suggested that the portfolio, which the student compiles during their course, was a greater positive benefit to adult students than to 16-19 year old students when applying to HE.*

Centres should be aware that some students will change their minds as a consequence of the course. One college found that although most adult students on GNVQ courses wanted to progress to HE, most had been attracted by the vocational nature of the GNVQ in the first place. Another centre, offering a GNVQ course to unemployed adults, found that over half the students left the course before the end because they were offered jobs as a consequence of work experience.

A clear dialogue is needed on all this, at the pre-entry guidance and counselling stage, to inform students of the options available to them.

The interview

A specialist approach to interviewing adults is needed. Prospective adult students arrive from many different backgrounds with a great variety of experiences and as a result the interview procedures almost always have to be purposefully far-ranging.

> *One centre planned its interview process in some detail. The interview had four stages: a one-to-one interview on the basis of a portfolio, a practical exercise, a stage focused on action planning and previous*

achievements and a final feedback stage. Applicants were told of the interview in a letter and also contacted by telephone to make sure they understood and were not worried about the interview. They were asked to bring examples of their work which could come from work, leisure pursuits or other courses. These were used as a focus for discussion in the interview and enabled the applicant to talk about interests and aspirations to help staff gauge existing levels of achievement.

The practical task was designed to contribute towards one of the GNVQ units and the outcomes were recorded for future use. Its purpose and process were discussed before applicants attempted it and, again, after it was completed. The practical task, together with information from the previous stages led to a discussion about prior achievements, areas for improvement and longer term goals. The final stage gave staff and applicant a chance to comment on the process and if the applicant felt insufficient time or attention had been paid to an aspect, a further meeting was arranged. Where applicants were advised that the GNVQ was not for them, alternatives were discussed and relevant information provided.

This process was time consuming but the staff involved were convinced the time was well spent. Applicants were selected equitably (important to the centre) and the process left staff and applicants feeling positive about the outcome. Staff also used the information generated through the interview process in the course induction and beyond.

Chapter 4

Marketing GNVQs to adults and recruiting adults to GNVQs

The two main target groups among mature students for GNVQ courses are:

- adults in work who have the support of their employers for study, almost always part time, and who wish to transfer to other jobs (perhaps in the same company) gain a business or technical qualification or progress to more job specific or professional training
- adults, not in employment, who are seeking the option of progression to a further or higher level vocational course or to employment. This group of adults could study in a variety of modes

Despite some obvious similarities these two cohorts have different needs and wants. Their motivation, recent experience and preferred patterns of attendance may differ and some students in employment might have access to some work-based learning opportunities.

The variety of adults recruited to GNVQ programmes in the study was noteworthy. It included self-employed students whose preferred pattern of attendance was close to that preferred by unemployed students and

some non-employed students with considerable past experience of work — some of it relevant to the GNVQ — who, because of family commitments, were only able to attend college in the evenings (like many employed students).

Most adults have significant commitments outside any course of study and will almost always be able to attend for fewer hours than full-time students aged 16-19. They will also be attracted to courses with different patterns of attendance to those designed for school leavers.

Centres in the project offered:

- part-time GNVQ courses for non-employed students — some with aspirations towards employment and others wishing to progress to HE
- part-time GNVQ courses to employed students with and without employer support
- full-time courses to unemployed and employed students

A number of centres decided to offer a part-time route to a GNVQ and then recruit students to it.

> *Centre A targeted two cohorts of student for a GNVQ Management course. One was an existing 'part-time day release' group which, until the availability of the GNVQ, would have attempted a variety of Business and Management qualifications. This group included students employed by local councils, the local NHS trust and some large private companies. The students in the second cohort, of whom the college had little experience, were from mainland Europe and elsewhere overseas, had first degrees and some work experience in their own country but wanted a UK qualification. These students were offered a package of EFL support and the GNVQ.*

Other centres set out to recruit employed students, with employer support, to a part-time GNVQ. Centres decided which GNVQ title to offer after deciding which employment sectors, and local employers, to target.

Centre B decided to try to recruit employed students to GNVQs in Leisure & Tourism and Retail & Distributive Service. The GNVQs were marketed to employers and through them to their employees. This approach was designed to ensure that students recruited had their employers' support and encouragement. An attempt to attract company training managers to a drinks reception was not a success so the college decided to target selected employers in businesses relevant to the GNVQs. Large employers were selected, each employing more than 50 staff, so that the employer could provide a range of learning and assessment contexts and cover for staff released to the course.

The college found that local employers knew little of GNVQs so described the GNVQ as a new qualification equivalent in standard to two GCE A levels but with the attractions, and more, of a higher level NVQ. This new approach interested the local branch of a large DIY chain, with a policy of employing people over 50. The employer decided that the Advanced GNVQ in Retail & Distributive Services was too advanced and too expensive for their needs but found the Intermediate GNVQ attractive. The college was able to recruit a core group of students, employed by the company, although in order to construct a viable group it had to infill the group with individually recruited students.

Another college, centre C, was a little sceptical of GNVQs for adults until they discovered that some of the college's construction company clients were not happy with the narrowness of NVQs. They were then able to interest one of the companies in a package made up of the GNVQ in Construction & the Built Environment and units from relevant NVQs. The college then found that unemployed adults, with significant experience of the construction industry but few qualifications, were also attracted by this package.

Some centres in the study targeted the unemployed or non-employed student.

Centre D, an adult education centre, offered a TEC-funded Intermediate GNVQ in Art & Design to unemployed adults.

Although the course took account of the likelihood that most adults would have other commitments, the course was more or less full time. The centre had considerable experience of offering a range of other courses and qualifications in Art & Design, including GCSE, GCE A-level and Access provision. It believed the GNVQ would be attractive to adults who cope better on courses which involve continuous assessment, who want a course which is less academic, more practical and which allows them to demonstrate what they are capable of doing rather than what they know. The GNVQ also enabled the centre to offer an explicit vocational course.

The centre managed to recruit a group of students aged between 21 and 49 from a variety of backgrounds, including painter, financial adviser, housewife, salesman, builder and silversmith. Most of the students recruited had some expertise or strong interest in Art & Design. Indeed, two thirds of the group felt, after discussion, that they had previous experience which would be suitable for APL. Many of them found the business focus of the GNVQ attractive.

Some centres have offered a GNVQ course explicitly for adults wishing to return to study as a preparation for progression to vocational HE.

Centre E found adults could be attracted to GNVQs for two reasons. Firstly, the vocational content, especially for those with some experience of working in business or technical occupations. Secondly the prospect of using the GNVQ as a route to HE, especially when the adult had obtained above average grades in school qualifications at age 16 before leaving education. Consequently the college designed a two and a half day week GNVQ course specifically for adults who wanted a pre-HE vocational access programme. It offered the Advanced GNVQs in Business and Science (and kept its Access provision in Humanities and Social Sciences). It was able to secure a progression agreement with a local HE institution wanting to attract more adults from the local community to its courses, especially in vocational subjects.

Another centre used the GNVQ as an access route to FE courses.

Centre F enrolled adult students on an eight-month course enabling the students to achieve six GNVQ units and Communication core skills at Advanced level. On completing this course, students had the option of completing the full GNVQ, switching to NVQ provision or professional qualifications offered by the college.

Chapter 5

Organising GNVQ provision for adults

GNVQ criteria, determined by NCVQ, state that students can collect and present evidence of their achievements regardless of 'mode, location or duration of learning'. Furthermore, FEFC funding for GNVQs, and other qualifications, is mode free. Neither of these statements mean students can be funded indefinitely for a course of GNVQ study, or that colleges will be funded for any number of hours teaching. The length of a GNVQ course can vary from less than a year to over three years and the student's pattern of attendance vary quite considerably. This flexibility in GNVQ course organisation is a particular strength when offering GNVQs to adults.

Mode and pattern of attendance

Centres in the study offering part-time GNVQs required between six and 25 hours for delivery. Similarly some GNVQ courses demand students attend college more or less every day between 9a.m. and 5p.m. while others are concentrated into a few days or evenings. Although most GNVQ courses run over one or two conventional teaching years (i.e. September to July) some start at other points in the year and run for shorter or longer periods, some with breaks between blocks of study.

Describing a GNVQ course as 'part time' or 'full time' may be useful for marketing and recruitment but such definitions are less important than fitting the course to student needs.

Research by the University of Surrey and a national consultation exercise undertaken by BTEC identified timetabling as a significant factor in the delivery of GNVQ part-time courses. In some colleges timetabling was devolved to individual course teams, in others all provision was fitted into a uniform cross-college framework. For example, some colleges required all courses to fit into a cross-college grid of blocks or semesters of 11 or 12 weeks. Students on part-time GNVQ courses were expected to complete three blocks each year.

Whatever the timetabling there must be a balance between the time needed for delivery and that needed for students to absorb new concepts. For example, the concepts behind financial forecasting and monitoring are easier for students to understand if delivered in 16 hours over eight weeks than in 16 hours spread over two weeks. GNVQ courses for adults need to take account of this issue.

Adults appreciate the flexibility of moving from a slow to a fast track as they build up confidence and develop skills. Similarly, they value the option of slowing down if outside pressures necessitate a longer study period. Building this flexibility into the course can help overcome the problem of students dropping out. A course and timetable structure should therefore devolve some control over the pace of learning to students. Blocks or semesters of study can be repeated and flexible 'drop-in' support workshops used. The unit structure of GNVQ is especially suitable for this.

Setting attendance times between 9.30a.m. and 3.00p.m. to take account of family commitments of the students is very common. One college in the study went further and, through a survey, found that GNVQ courses offered on a Saturday morning would be very attractive to adults. Of those stating they would be able to attend college on a Saturday

morning, 80% said they would be unable to attend during the week. Significantly 50% of those surveyed were not employed.

The precise number of hours per week devoted to a GNVQ course for adults will depend upon a number of factors:

- employed students with access to learning in the workplace, or students with considerable experience of the GNVQ subject matter, may need fewer hours per week than students who are entirely new to the GNVQ and have little opportunity to learn outside college
- adults who have been away from education for some time may need more support, and so teaching time, at least in the early part of their course
- adults with above average achievements on entry to the GNVQ may require less time to succeed than those with more modest achievements.
- colleges which accept that some students will drop out or not achieve the GNVQ in the time available may not devote as many hours to the GNVQ as colleges which are determined that every student will achieve the full qualification
- similarly, colleges prepared to subsidise an adult GNVQ course may be able to find more hours per week for the GNVQ than colleges needing to recoup the cost of every hour of teaching

The structure and organisation of GNVQ courses for adults in colleges involved in the research project varied considerably, but few colleges believed that courses designed for school leavers could simply be 'scaled down' and most admitted they had rethought the structure of their provision at least once.

The GNVQ courses for adults in the study fell into three main groups of courses run over at least 30 consecutive weeks of the year for:

- one or two days per week

- two or more evenings per week
- four or five days per week

Within each main category there were wide variations. For example, one college offered a GNVQ course for adults over four or five days per week but in blocks of 10 or 12 weeks with significant breaks between each block.

One or two days per week

Most courses were organised as one or two days per week totalling between three and 20 hours for 30-36 weeks.

Centre C. ran a GNVQ course over two years. Students attended college for one day a week between 2p.m. and 9p.m. and received six hours teaching. Each year was divided into two 16-week blocks following a two-week induction. Students attempted three units in each block and the end of each block coincided with external tests. Core skills were integrated into the vocational part of the course and students were given open access to computers and other learning resources. This course recruited some students who were in work and able to negotiate a half day per week study leave from their employer. Other students on the course were not in employment and some attended college on other days of the week to take GCSEs or a GCE A level. Another centre had designed an almost identical course but in order to make the course more attractive to adults with childcare responsibilities the day was broken into three two-hour sessions — 10a.m. to 12 noon, 1p.m. to 3p.m. and 7p.m. to 9p.m.

At centre G. an Advanced GNVQ in Business was timetabled over two days per week for a total of 12 hours. Day 1 consisted of two hours tutorial support followed by five hours vocational teaching. The second day was composed of three hours in a vocational workshop followed by two hours dedicated to the IT and Application of Number core skills. Students focused on three units at a time for a period of 16 weeks. It was possible to begin the course in September, when the first 16-week period began, or in January when the second began. Most of the students on this course were not in employment.

Most centres in the project offered dedicated adult GNVQ courses but smaller centres may not be able to do this. Two centres in the study offered adults the opportunity to infill into GNVQ courses designed for and mostly recruiting school leavers.

Centre H. offered adults the chance to study for a GNVQ course in Business over two years part time by allowing them to infill onto the full-time course for 16-19 year old students. The minimum time required of adults was six hours per week made up of two three hour sessions. Students tackled two units per term. The college was aware that this pattern was very intensive and students were selected for the course only if they were in full-time employment and had the support of their employer. Most of the adults recruited to this course were younger adults and the centre was aware of some difficulties. The students never gelled as a group and staff found the mixed group and different patterns of attendance created some management problems.

At Centre I. adults attended for ten-12 hours of a 12-14 hours per week course for school leavers. The adults received ten hours of contact (they did not attend core skills support and could opt out of tutorials) and did not take additional units. The timetable allowed adults to complete their involvement in the course within two and half days per week although they had to attend for a block of study in the third term. Some open learning support was available. This course recruited older adults than the course at centre H and was more appropriate for unemployed students.

One college designed a GNVQ course for adults and anticipated adults attending college for a few hours every week for 32 weeks. However this course was redesigned.

At College B. group of employed adults was recruited on to an Intermediate Retail & Distributive Services GNVQ course. Initially it offered the course one day per week over 32 weeks. However, the company and the students both came to the conclusion that a course made up of short, intensive blocks of study would be better. As a result

a course was built around three blocks of five weeks spread over the calender year. Each block required the students to attend for one and a half days and two evenings per week (totalling 12 hours) and the student attempted two units during each block. The end of each block coincided with an external test series. This new approach meant that the employer only released staff for a total of 22.5 days (compared with 32 days for the original course) and students attended for 30 evenings instead of 32. More importantly, the students found that the blocked approach made it easier to complete work and assignments.

One or two evenings per week

Some centres offered GNVQ courses for adults in the evening. Not surprisingly these courses were designed primarily for adults in employment. Colleges assumed students recruited would have some significant prior knowledge of the GNVQ subject matter and tailored the provision accordingly.

In centres offering access to a GNVQ through evening study there was a consensus that students would have to attend for around six hours per week, usually two evenings per week, for two years. Students usually attempted two units per term so each unit was timetabled for one evening per week over a term. Colleges made little allowance for tutorial support and a totally integrated approach to core skills was common. Colleges were careful to recruit students with access to some learning outside the course (usually through employment) and students likely to manage without core skill support. Some colleges offered students access to 'drop in' workshops although these were usually only available immediately before the teaching session began. One issue these colleges had to address was that of the external tests. The testing regulations of the awarding bodies allow some testing in the evening but it is at the expense of a daytime testing opportunity and so colleges sometimes have to balance the competing demands of evening and day students for access to tests during their usual periods of college study.

Four or five days per week

Colleges or centres wanting to recruit students who were not in employment offered some GNVQ courses over four or five days.

An Advanced GNVQ course, aimed at adult returners, was offered at centre J. This course was organised over ten teaching hours per week for 72 weeks. In addition, three hours per week were provided through workshops producing a total of 936 hours for the course. As the college was keen to point out, this compared with a minimum of 900 hours advised for a 'full time' Advanced GNVQ course for school leavers. However, the differences between the adult course and the school leaver course were myriad. The former was concentrated between 10a.m. and 3p.m. each day, while the latter often required students to be in college between 9a.m. and 5p.m. The former assumed that few students would take additional studies, the latter assumed that most would. The former gave the students some significant control over the pace of their learning, the latter used more rigid approaches to learning.

Centre D. ran a TEC-funded Intermediate GNVQ Art & Design course for unemployed adults over 23 weeks. The structure of the course took account of TEC funding requirements and DSS regulations on studying. (At the time the centre ran this course, the DSS allowed students to attend studies for up to 21 hours per week.) The centre had a cross-centre timetabling policy — all provision was timetabled into three two-hour slots per day, reflecting the childcare responsibilities of many of the centre's students. Generally, students on the GNVQ were expected to attend for four hours per day for five days per week (i.e. 20 hours per week). Some flexibility was possible as some optional and additional studies were timetabled in the evening. The course recruited well and, because the centre realised that it would be intensive, it recruited adults with some experience of, or significant interest in, art and design.

Opportunities for fast tracking

Although many adult students will not be able to attend college for as many hours as school leavers, they are often content for their course to be spread over a similar number of weeks. These adults will be attracted to an intensive fast-track GNVQ course. The research study found dedicated fast-track courses for employed and unemployed adults.

Centre E. developed a fast-track part-time Advanced GNVQ Science course specifically for adults who had obtained science qualifications (usually GCSEs and A levels) while at school (and some time ago). The fast-track Advanced GNVQ offered a route to HE while keeping open the option of employment and provided a way of allowing students to 'revise' and/or revisit the learning they had undertaken for their school qualifications and obtain a new qualification. The unit structure of the GNVQ meant students could work at their own pace (so allowing students to spend more time focusing on gaps in their knowledge). Significantly the college considered the GNVQ more rigorous and more widely acceptable than the college Access programme in science. The GNVQ was offered one day per week with flexible hours and home study for adults with childcare responsibilities.

Centre F. developed a one-year vocational introductory course, using the Intermediate Health & Social Care course for adults aspiring to work in this field. The course was designed to provide access to work as a care assistant in a range of care settings or progression to the Advanced GNVQ in Health & Social Care. The college only recruited students aged 21 or over and although experience of care was an advantage, it was not a prerequisite. The programme was offered over two days per week: one day at college (for nine hours) and another day on a placement secured by the college.

Centre K. secured TEC funding for a fast-track Advanced GNVQ in Business for unemployed adults. The course ran over 48 weeks. The first four weeks required students to attend full time for an intensive induction programme and then full time, for 26 weeks followed by a final five-week intensive block. Finally, students went out on work

placement for 13 weeks, during the college summer vacation. While on placement they received tutorial support. The course targeted unemployed adults who were recruited through job centres and the local paper. In fact, the course was over-subscribed and the college used entry tests to select applicants with above average prior core skill achievements. Twenty adults began the course, aged between 21 and 51 with diverse backgrounds, most (17) wishing to return to employment.

Whatever the pattern of course organisation chosen, it is likely that colleges will need to keep it under review and amend it as local circumstances change. Adult markets for GNVQs will change as local employment patterns change and as other courses and centres compete with each other.

Funding considerations

One of the key external determinants of how a GNVQ course is organised and offered will be how it is funded. GNVQ courses in the study were funded by one of two agencies: FEFC or a TEC. Nearly every centre in the study offered FEFC-funded GNVQ courses for adults and three offered GNVQ courses for adults funded by a local TEC. A few general conclusions can be drawn from their experiences.

Because GNVQs were designed primarily for school leavers and for full-time study, the FEFC has assumed that most GNVQ students will be 16-19 years old and studying full time. This is a reasonable assumption but it has led to a funding system which presents a hurdle to colleges wishing to expand their GNVQ provision, offer part-time GNVQ courses and attract more adults back into education and training. Despite this, colleges in the study successfully offered GNVQ courses to adults and obtained FEFC funding to do so.

FEFC funds GNVQs (whether for adults or any other group) in one of two ways — as individually listed qualifications or through the FEFC load bands.

Around 65% of all college enrolments are covered by qualifications, including GNVQs, which are designated as individually listed qualifications. For these qualifications the FEFC allocates a fixed number of funding units. In the case of GNVQs this is 84 for Foundation and Intermediate GNVQs and 168 for Advanced GNVQs. This is the same number of funding units as most 'full-time' courses. Although FEFC assumes that most Foundation or Intermediate GNVQ courses will be completed within a year and most Advanced GNVQ courses within two years the funding methodology is mode free and colleges can devise any pattern of attendance for GNVQs. However, in order to qualify for the 168 funding units which are available when the GNVQ is treated as an individually listed qualification the GNVQ course must consist of at least 450 guided learning hours per year. If this criterion is not met the qualification cannot be funded in this way and must be funded through the FEFC load bands. The load bands are designed for funding courses of between nine and 449 guided learning hours per year.

The FEFC defines guided learning hours as:

> *all times when a member of staff is present to give specific guidance towards the qualification...being studied...This includes lectures, tutorials and supervised study in, for example, open learning centres and learning workshops. It also includes time spent by staff assessing students' achievements...It does not include hours where supervision or assistance is of a general nature and is not specific to the study of the students.'*

(*How to apply for funding 1996-97*, FEFC)

This definition is important when designing GNVQ courses for adults. If a college designs a course to run over 36 weeks, for example, it will need to offer 12.5 guided learning hours per week. This need only represent one and a half days at college and, importantly, students need not be in formal lectures for all the 12.5 hours per week. Most colleges in the study recognised, and made use of, this fact. Some colleges in the

project spread the course over more than 36 weeks so reducing the number of guided learning hours per week.

GNVQ courses funded through the load bands can run for more than two years although colleges did not think this would be attractive to many adult students. Irrespective of the number of hours devoted to the GNVQ course, FEFC funding through the load bands is not as generous as it is for individually listed qualifications. Currently they attract about 60% of the funding.

Despite this, colleges have offered GNVQ courses funded in this way. These colleges have found they need to employ very cost-effective teaching and learning styles and need to demand significant self study from the students. This can mean recruiting students who are less likely to need support and more likely to have past and continuing experiences which can be credited.

The other main source of funding for adult GNVQ courses is the local TEC.

Centre D ran a TEC-funded Intermediate GNVQ course for unemployed adults over 23 weeks. Students attended for four hours per day, five days per week (i.e. 20 hours per week). Three of the weeks were designated as home study — two half-term weeks and a week at Easter — so, in total, the course ran for around 400 hours.

Centre K. secured TEC funding for a fast-track Advanced GNVQ for unemployed adults. In total the course consumed 576 hours spread over 48 weeks. The first four weeks required students to attend for 30 hours per week. Students then attended for 12 hours per week for 26 weeks, followed followed by five weeks at 21 hours per week. They then spend 13 weeks on work placement receiving three hours week tutorial support.

In another centre, M., adult students took a full Advanced GNVQ in one year, as an adult training programme supported by the local TEC. This involved two days in college (five to six hours per day), two days

on work placement organised by the college, and one day for evidence collection and assembly. This centre did feel that their approach had limitations. A total of 480 course hours were available.

All the centres which offered GNVQ courses with TEC funding had mixed feelings about the experience. The TEC funding had provided the centre with a valuable opportunity to construct a GNVQ course for unemployed adults. TECs had supported fairly flexible provision and the level of funding covered the cost of a reasonable number of course hours.

However, a significant proportion of the TEC funding came to the college per student per week. Any student drop out, whether for good reason or not, meant the college immediately lost income. One centre faced some drop out mid-way through the course and was unable to replace the students. As a result the course did not 'break even'. Another found some students failed to return to the course after being withdrawn from the course for Job Start interviews. This college also lost some funding as a result.

Similarly, part of the TEC sum was an amount per week for time spent on placement. This sum was reliant on the student completing their work placement and some students had spent only three to four days on work experience when they were offered jobs and left the programme. Although this had obvious benefits to the student it meant the college lost income. All the centres agreed that the costing of TEC-funded provision needs to be managed very carefully.

One TEC was particularly interested in the potential of flexible delivery of GNVQs for adults and helped the college set up an Open Learning workshop for adults with a £20,000 grant.

Chapter 6

The GNVQ learning programme for adults

There are many differences between GNVQ courses for adults and school leavers but no matter how different the patterns of attendance and the backgrounds and aspirations of the student group, the most significant difference should be in the style of teaching, learning and assessment.

One centre in the study summed this issue up well:

> *We have found in (the adult GNVQ group), as in other adult groups, that the high level of motivation of the students enables them to cover ground much more quickly. When they understand the task, they are much more likely to work on the assignment until it is finished, and often outside course time. Their life experience has provided them with processes of evaluation and an understanding of the importance of time which are an advantage in a system of learning which expects them to take significant responsibility for their learning. In our comparisons, we observed the adult group to be much less likely to be distracted by other events and more likely to concentrate on the task in hand. Adult students are also more likely to engage in a dialogue about their work, rather than leave all the talking to the tutor.*

Induction programmes

Some differences in induction stemmed from whether adult students were enrolled on a course by their employer or whether they enrolled as individuals: employers did not expect students to go through a lengthy induction process. However, colleges were cautious of abandoning induction entirely. They stressed the need to prepare students for a qualification designed to encourage and even expect students to take a role in managing their own learning.

Another obvious and important factor in the design of the induction component for the GNVQ was the total time available to the course. Centres pointed out that when offering shorter, or more 'part-time' GNVQ courses to adults there is a temptation to provide a short induction period to maximise time for other activities. This temptation is understandable yet one centre concluded that a longer induction programme would have benefited the group by ensuring that students fully understood the nature of GNVQs before beginning to produce work which would contribute towards the achievement of the qualification. It would have helped students use their time efficiently and effectively.

Running counter to the attractions of a longer induction programme is the fact that adult students usually wish to start learning as soon as possible. Therefore induction programmes should never appear to mark time and should always be as short as possible, highly structured, adult focused and professional.

Centres devised a number of strategies for induction:

- considerable emphasis on pre-course induction and guidance aimed at helping adults understand the structure of a GNVQ and building the confidence of mature students returning to study
- a common induction to three GNVQ programmes with 'taster' sessions timetabled into the induction programme

- a comprehensive student handbook which reduced the detail often included in an induction programme and provided an easy reference later
- staff responded to the need to keep induction short and preserve time for learning activities by effectively dispersing some parts of the induction throughout the year. Instead of introducing students to every document during induction the course team used a 'drip feed' approach, introducing the various forms at points throughout the first term

Induction programmes always need to recognise the different experiences and past achievements of students. GNVQ courses for adults need to be especially conscious of this need.

Adults often undervalue their own achievements and programmes for adults need to offer plenty of opportunity for the students to learn how to recognise and claim credit for their achievements.

Some adult students arrive with considerable vocational knowledge. The student's CV will usually provide a guide to the vocational skills they might have and indicate whether they can be 'fast tracked' to the assessment of a vocational unit.

Although adults' core skill achievement was often superior to that of school leavers, they often did not recognise it — especially where problem solving skills or working with others were concerned — skills many adults develop outside their working life as well as through it. A number of colleges used diagnostic tests to identify existing core skills.

Centres found that adult recruits to GNVQs had far more variable levels of IT skills. As one adult education co-ordinator put it:

> *Our [adult GNVQ] students are far more organised than the 16 year old [students] and are far better at group work and problem solving but most of them left school before the IT revolution and only those who had worked in IT contexts had anything like the IT skills most school kids have these days.*

This centre decided to make IT a key part of the induction programme as a consequence, a strategy supported by other centres in the project.

Adults might also find activities such as action planning and evidence gathering unfamiliar and off putting, and the induction needs to include a far wider range of topics than offered to school leavers. Adults will benefit from early guidance in the techniques of self management, personal development and study planning. They may also need assistance in learning how to use study materials and resources.

One centre spent a significant portion of the induction programme concentrating on developing the skills students need to deal with recording systems, manage their own learning and assess their own performance. In the centre's final report the co-ordinator remarked that the early investment in developing these skills through induction had paid off.

Most centres addressed the following issues:

- the course requirements
- structure of GNVQs
- action planning
- APL advice
- assessment and grading criteria
- core skills
- portfolio building
- personal and welfare guidance
- career and progression planning

Teaching strategies

Partly because GNVQs were designed for full-time study in schools and colleges, GNVQ courses can be very time consuming. GNVQ courses for adults need to solve a central dilemma. Centres need to provide plenty

of support but acknowledge adults' other commitments. Centres will need to :

- employ teaching and learning strategies which motivate mature students, devolve some control over learning to the student, offer plenty of opportunities for adults to develop and demonstrate achievement and provide significant individual support for students who may not have recent experience of education

yet:

- make sure teaching and learning strategies are time effective and efficient

The maturity and experience of adult students enabled them to assume the role of facilitators in group work more easily than 16-year-old students. This had its effect on the teacher's which became one of:

- identifying and recognising each students' prior learning in relation to each unit
- guiding the student towards sources of information and evidence
- ensuring coverage of the range to help prepare students for the tests
- helping students to evaluate their work

This changed role meant that teachers spent more time determining the structure of the course and identifying potential opportunities for assessment. This emphasis on planning was also essential if the course was to be time efficient — critical for adult students.

Many GNVQ teaching teams adopted a more structured teaching approach for part-time and adult students than for their full-time and 16-19 equivalents because of the time pressures. This was especially true in the early part of the course.

Although each GNVQ unit is of equal weighting, certain units are likely to require more (or less) input than others. For example, adult students on an Advanced Business GNVQ may be familiar with the knowledge contained in the unit on human resources but less familiar with the knowledge in the unit on financial forecasting and monitoring. Mapping the prior learning of the group and individuals against what is required for each unit helps maximise the achievement and preserve time for what needs to be learnt.

Adult students, more than school leavers, need to focus on the narrower confines of individual unit specifications and benefit from having achievements recorded as they occur. Staff also reported that using a series of short, highly focused assignments was most efficient when teaching GNVQs to adults. They recommended combining two or more elements in an assignment and linking assignments using a common theme.

This approach to teaching and learning has implications for the integration of GNVQ units. By and large integration is more difficult for adult students than it is for school leavers. The tendency for students to attempt units individually also means centres need to consider the sequence in which units are taught and assessed. Many adult courses leave optional units to the end of the course which has the added advantage of postponing the time when students have to make decisions about specialisms.

One centre initially favoured an integrated approach using assignments set across several units to demonstrate core skills and meet grading criteria. However, they found that an integrated approach can cause difficulties when preparing students for the external tests.

Another calculated that in a three-hour class only one and half hours was spent on delivery. The rest of the time was allocated to course work which could be completed in a 'resource rich environment'. Similarly several centres examined the possibilities of delivering a part-time adult

programme with considerably reduced 'delivery' time from tutors. Ways of achieving this included:

- creating student-centred resource packs
- providing workshops (particularly for core skills)
- open learning

Some units may lend themselves to resource-based learning materials. These need to be available when students can use them and for students who only attend college during the evenings this raises issues of access and staffing. Offering workshops outside the formally designated session times can increase the time available for student study. One centre actively investigated the potential for offering drop-in workshops on a Saturday morning and found that many adults would make use of such an opportunity.

Some centres offered optional units on an open learning basis. One college in the project ran an open learning scheme for an entire Intermediate GNVQ in Business. The students were all employed and met once a fortnight for two hours with their tutor. The programme provided:

- a brief induction
- two mandatory units in term 1
- two mandatory units in term 2
- two optional units in term 3

Students were selected on the basis of whether they understood and could cope with the demands of self study.

The college expected students to study a minimum of 9-12 hours a week, although in practice they did not study more than four to seven hours a week. The advantages of this approach to teaching and learning for adults are obvious but there are disadvantages. Adult students especially like feedback and contact with teachers. Valuable time can be lost if students progress to the next task of an assignment or project only

to discover at a later stage that mistakes were made. Nor should the open learning approach preclude group work and contact with other students. Some centres timetabled day and evening drop-in sessions to back up self directed study.

All the centres set aside a period of time to discuss the mechanics of the course (i.e. evidence gathering, action planning and evaluation, group work, etc.).

Core skills

Adult students generally have more highly developed non-mandatory core skills than 16-19 year old students. If these skills are accredited early on during a course this can motivate and encourage the students. Some centres reported level 4 core skills, particularly in Communication, and Improving own learning and Performance could be achieved by many adults relatively early in the course.

GNVQ centres are always keen to exploit as many opportunities as possible to integrate core skills into the vocational content. However, some adults need time to gain confidence and may prefer to develop skills before subjecting them to integration. As well as offering dedicated core skill teaching and learning opportunities, most colleges in the project offered core skill support on a flexible or open learning basis with specially designed learning packs. Issues of access and staffing outside formal course times had to be resolved.

IT and Application of Number core skills were very often delivered outside a vocational context for the reasons given above and because many adults need extra support with IT and mathematical subject matter. Most also included an IT input in their induction programme to facilitate progress on the course.

A few of the centres recruited adults for whom English was a second language. Although the vocational, numeracy and problem-solving skills of these students could be very impressive, staff were concerned

that some had difficulty achieving core skill components at the same level as their vocational units They remarked that some Communication elements, such as 'speak and write using an appropriate tone', were very difficult for those from different cultures. Colleges set up additional workshops to help these adult students improve their skills.

Assessment

For some students the transparency of the GNVQ assessment system may be attractive and motivating. For others the presence of external tests and the volume of work can be unattractive. Some students value the grading system because it is based upon process skills while others do not like the absence of grades for each unit of the qualification.

GNVQs were perceived to be more demanding in terms of the amount of work required than most other adult courses. The requirement to produce a portfolio of evidence to show that all evidence indicators have been met is onerous and students need well developed organisational and study skills to be able to do this. One tutor commented that some students had failed GNVQs because they could not cope with the amount of paper work and not because of the standard of their work.

In order to maximise the achievements of the students within limited time, staff will need to plan and manage assessment carefully. Ideally, course teams should have an annual plan showing when opportunities for assessment are going to be available. Staff should also use a mixture of time-effective approaches to evidence gathering. For example, students can be assessed by oral presentations and observation rather than a top-heavy system of written assignments. Questioning of students is particularly valid as a means of assessment as it conveys the depth and extent of their understanding.

Evidence for a number of components of the GNVQ (core skills and some elements of a unit) can be generated from a single assessment activity. Centres should also remember that some, if not all, adult

students may have evidence from their work and past experiences which can be used for the GNVQ.

Access to tests is an important consideration. Times and dates for sitting tests can be more critical for adult students than 16-19 year old students. External tests are offered on three occasions during the year with a further resit opportunity in September. Colleges can control the timetabling of the tests so that papers can be sat during the day or the evening to accommodate the students. When daytime and evening students wish to sit the same test series this needs managing.

One tutor (of GNVQ Art & Design students) reported that students with high levels of competence in visual expression may not express themselves to the same level when performing written tasks for a GNVQ. Some adult students regard as difficult a question that is simple to a 16 year old because the adult is looking for complicated solutions. However, adults can score better on external tests than younger students because they can draw on wider experiences and general knowledge. Most centres provided special support to students preparing for the external tests by:

- offering workshops on tests
- giving students practice tests and reviewing their performance
- devising study packs focusing on the underpinning knowledge

Despite these challenges, most adult students in the study who completed their course did achieve the GNVQ and, of course, unit certification is possible.

The course team

The unit structure of GNVQs can lead to a fragmentation of the course. Similarly the absence of a nationally determined scheme of work can lead to some uncertainty among individual teachers over what is to be

achieved, by when and by which method. The course team has a key role in bringing together all the staff involved so that they can jointly plan the course and make sure no part of any unit is left uncovered.

Course teams usually include a number of specialists and the course teams in the study included at least some individuals with significant experience of teaching adults. Most centres thought it essential the team learn from the experiences of those who had developed Access provision. The experience of BTEC National Certificate was important where the GNVQ course was part time and for employed students. Part-time staff contracts need to include time for planning and staff training, attending course team meetings as well as delivery of the course.

Some staff will need training on marketing GNVQs to adults; induction and APL approaches for adults aiming for GNVQs; the use of GNVQ documentation and its simplification and adaptation for adults and/or intensive courses and training; designing assignments to the GNVQ assessment criteria. Some staff will need to be trained as verifiers and it is advisable for all team members to be trained to TDLB standards or to achieve the GNVQ Planning and Assessment Units.

It is essential that internal verification is properly planned especially when the course offers little time for students and staff to repeat teaching and assignments. Colleges also stressed the special importance of time for tutorials and one-to-one meetings with students when offering a GNVQ course for adults. Similarly, even if GNVQ materials are readily available they will need adapting and developing for adult students.

Course evaluation

GNVQs are still new and there is still only limited experience of offering them to adults. Even when the course is established it is important to monitor and evaluate the course. Markets are unlikely to remain constant. No group of adults will be the same and the course team may change or may wish to explore different approaches to teaching,

learning and assessment. Monitoring and evaluation involve collecting information on a variety of aspects of the course including:

- recruitment rates
- the profiles of students recruited
- completion rates
- reasons for early drop out
- success rates
- progression rates and destinations
- student satisfaction surveys
- external verification reports

If this data is collected properly and accurately, it can be a very rich source of information when developing or improving the course.

Chapter 7
Conclusion

The study shows that it is possible to design GNVQ courses for adults, although any such course should be carefully planned and located alongside existing provision for adults. Adults, and especially those returning to education, who definitely want to progress to HE, especially in non-vocational subjects, may continue to find Access courses more appropriate to their needs.

Adults in employment who wish to study part time for a technical qualification will continue to find BTEC National Certificates attractive. However, adults who are attracted by unit-based or modular courses, who wish to obtain a nationally designed broad vocational qualification, acceptable to both employers and higher education, will find the GNVQ suited to their needs and aspirations.

GNVQs have particular strengths. They embody national standards and the inclusion of core skills is a unique and widely welcomed characteristic. The unit structure of GNVQ makes for flexibility and allows unit accreditation and certification. On the other hand, GNVQs are time consuming. Interestingly, the GNVQ assessment system, while generally thought to be over complicated, was not thought to be particularly inappropriate for adults.

When planning a GNVQ course for adults colleges will need to pay particular attention to:

- the target group
- funding
- progression
- time

It will be necessary to decide which group of adults to target. Centres with very clear ideas about who they wished to recruit were far more successful than those who simply opened their doors to anyone aged over 19. The characteristics of the target group will determine many of the details of the course.

Whoever makes up the target group, colleges will need to make sure that they have recruited students who can benefit from a GNVQ and for whom the GNVQ is most appropriate. This will mean mature pre-entry guidance systems, a focused and professional approach to interview and selection, and well-designed induction programmes.

Funding the GNVQ is obviously an important matter. Colleges agreed that it is best to seek funding from FEFC and it is possible to design and offer GNVQ courses for adults which are part-time, flexible and attractive, and still satisfy the FEFC requirement for 450 guided learning hours per year. Funding through the FEFC load bands or through TECs is possible and can be successful but demands a very specific target group of adult students. Whatever the source of funding, colleges should plan and cost the course accurately and realistically.

Even before students have been recruited it may be wise to secure progression routes from the GNVQ. This may mean entering into compacts with universities or employers or simply raising awareness of the GNVQ, the course and the student group to be recruited to local employers and colleges.

GNVQs can be very time consuming for staff and students. Time management techniques may need to be developed for teachers and the student group. Because time is at a premium proper planning will be a necessity.

Perhaps the final word on offering GNVQs to adults should go to one of the staff involved with the work who reported:

> *If it wasn't for the funding difficulties and the over complicated assessment system I'd say GNVQs are wasted on school leavers and would be far better suited to adults.*

Chapter 8

FEDA's GNVQ Support Programme 1996-7

In 1995 FEDA received the first year of funding to manage a programme of support for GNVQ curriculum delivery and staff development in FE and sixth-form colleges and in schools with sixth forms.

During this year 64 FE and sixth-form colleges were funded to undertake development projects in various aspects of GNVQs. These were very successful in enabling colleges to achieve considerable improvements and nearly 1,000 lecturers were involved in the work in some way. Some of the projects looked specifically at adults and GNVQs and a directory of projects has been produced containing information about each project and priced materials which may be helpful to other centres.

Networks were established to support specific GNVQs and key skills and a series of seminars and conferences were held.

In October 1995 a FEDA GNVQ helpline was opened to provide information about all aspects of GNVQs and by April 1996 had responded to 1535 enquiries. A database of GNVQ support materials was also set up and in May this year an Internet service went live

enabling users to use the database and leave comments on individual materials.

In the second year of the programme which began in April 1996, the emphasis is on support to improve key skills, assessment and grading, staff development and progression. Funding to support development projects in individual centres has been extended to include approximately 100 schools and 44 FE and sixth-form colleges. Series of subject-specific seminars are taking place and the key skills networks are tackling some of the major issues identified in the recent Ofsted report on GNVQs in schools and raised in the first year of network meetings. The Helpline and Internet services have been expanded to cover a wider range of information and materials and a major project is under way to produce criteria against which materials can be profiled by teachers, lecturers and by others interested in quality-assured GNVQ support materials.

FEDA's GNVQ support programme is now well established and ready to undertake a major role in supporting the introduction of changes to GNVQs which have resulted from recommendations in the Capey and Dearing reports. Work has begun to identify the type of support centres needed during the transition phase up to September 1998. During the third year of the Support Programme FEDA will be specifying, commissioning and undertaking work on materials and staff development programmes to provide colleges and schools with a range of support for the introduction of the new GNVQ model from September 1998.

As this year, FEDA will work collaboratively with NCVQ, SCAA, the Joint Council of National Vocational Awarding Bodies and the awarding bodies to provide a coherent programme of support.

If you would like further details of the FEDA GNVQ support programme services:

The GNVQ Helpline is available on 0171 962 1066 between 8.30 and 5.30.

Details of the free GNVQ support programme development fund directory, hard copies of the database resource list (which includes details of priced materials available from a range of other sources) and copies of the Latest News are all available from the Helpline.

GNVQ support programme's Internet address is http://feda.ac.uk

FEDA publications series

Developing FE: Volume 1

1. Student Tracking
2. Caseloading
3. Assessing impact: provision for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities
4. Adults and GNVQs

FE Matters: Volume 1

1. Environmental Education in FE: part 1
2. Environmental Education in FE: part 2
3. Towards self-assessing colleges
4. Colleges working with industry

FEDA bulletins: Volume 1

1. Developing colleges strategies for Human Resource Development
2. Enhancing GCE A-level programmes
3. Impact of voucher schemes on the FE curriculum
4. Quality assurance in colleges
5. Maintaining quality during curriculum change
6. Action planning and recording achievement
7. Implementing modular A levels
8. Comparing content in selected GCE A levels and Advanced GNVQs
9. Engineering the future
10. Charters in FE: Making them work
11. Access to accreditation
12. Back to the future: modern apprenticeship schemes
13. Competing for business: colleges and the Competitiveness Fund

Glossary

APL	Accreditation of Prior Learning
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
FEDA	Further Education Development Agency
FEFC	Further Education Funding Council
GNVQ	General National Vocational Qualification
HND	Higher National Diploma
NCVQ	National Council for Vocational Qualifications
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
TEC	Training and Enterprise Council
TDLB	Training and Development Lead Body

DEVELOPING FE

FEDA report

ISSN 1361 - 9969

Price £10.00

BEST COPY AVAILABLE